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NOTICES OF NEW BOOKS

The Complete Works of Plotinos. Translated by KENNETH SYLVAN GUTHRIE. Alpine, N. J., Comparative Literature Press, 1918.—pp., Vol. I, 282; II, 353, III, 371; IV, 380.

Up to the present time it has been customary to call Ammonius Sakkas the Father of Neo-Platonism—and that on a mere tradition; whereas there remains of Ammonius Sakkas only a few trifling fragments, ascribed to him jointly with some other writer. This statement continued to pass as truth for another reason, namely, that his disciple's works, those of Plotinus, were in such a confusion that almost anything could be read into them. For instance, they have been used by Augustine and others as a mine of practical mysticism, while the German Drews used them as supports for Hartmann's Philosophy of the Unconscious. The difficulty of the Greek, in addition, together with the extent of the writings, conspired to keep the texts inaccessible. Of course, there were translations—that of Bouillet, but beyond price; the German, expensive, and as difficult, if not more so, than the original. Thomas Taylor had of course selected a few mystical writings, but they too were tinged with mediæval mysticism, besides being entirely unsystematic.

In order to clear up the situation, two things were necessary. The first was a translation that would make the sources, as a whole, accessible. The length and the difficulty of the undertaking had deterred the most laborious. First, as to the length, it would have proved a deterrent, except that the life-problems of a student who in his youth had attempted to throw together an outline of the philosophy of Plotinus compelled him to undergo the ordeal. As to the difficulty, his translation does not pretend to solve insoluble problems, problems which must have been present to the author; for had he analyzed his thought more clearly, he would probably have stated it unmistakably. All that the present translation pretends to do is to present in clear English the thought of the translator, as a provisional means of approaching linguistic difficulties to which centuries of research are welcome, with the advantage that doubtful passages have been interpreted in the light of parallel statements, and in harmony with the philosophical sources of the text.

But mere translation made the reigning confusion still more striking. It reminded one very much of the Pentateuch in the Bible. Criticism has there unravelled the tangle, by demonstrating that some editor mixed sources in themselves coherent, in obedience to some prearranged purpose. Was there such a purpose in the mind of Plotinus's editor, Porphyry? The latter, in his preface, explains it in detail. It was, in those days, fashionable (not even the works of Plato had entirely escaped this process) to group an author's works by subject, or length,—in this case, into six "enneads" of nine books each,

with a fine disregard of the chronology of their origin. Porphyry claimed to have made this arrangement in order to group the works by subject; but such an idea was illusory, in view of the desultory nature of Plotinus's thought in many individual essays; and the result was such a confusion that the very first essay is practically the last one written by Plotinus.

Under such circumstances, it was no wonder that readers of Plotinus found it difficult to discover consistency, inasmuch as it is the natural course of life for thinkers to grow in power, and even fail in later years, as happened to Schlegel, to Plato, and others. Indeed, Porphyry explicitly records this of Plotinus. It was therefore necessary to unravel this tangle by both doing the work of translation, and by printing the works in their chronological order. The result was as illuminating as with the Pentateuch. It was discovered that the earlier period was Numenian, or Gnostico-Platonic, the second Porphyrian, or Stoic, while in later years Plotinus returned to his earlier views. The latter indeed may not be the case, if in his later years he was merely giving out early incomplete works, to put his writings together.

It will of course be asked, How could so great a thinker as Plotinus prove so changeable in his views? The answer is interesting. Plotinus was absorbed in thinking, and left writing to his secretaries; writing must to him have been laborious, especially in later years when his eyesight was low, for neither his speech nor writing was scholarly; Porphyry mentions specific vulgarisms. He had as first secretary Amelius, the legatee of the works of Numenius, who knew them all by heart. Is it any wonder, then, that in the writings of the Amelian period a number of Numenian expressions can be demonstrated? In the second or Porphyrian period, we find the most systematic treatises, Stoic in character. When Porphyry wished to commit suicide and was persuaded as alternative to sojourn to Sicily, Plotinus was thrown back on his earlier thought; and therefore it is no wonder that he returns to Platonic opinions. Thus Plotinus's views become consistent, in each period; and therefore we will in the future, as we do with Plato, not speak of Plotinus's views, but of views of Plotinus of the first, second, or third periods.

Interesting as this rescuing of Plotinus's progress of views is, it would be no more than grave-digging, were it not for the light that it sheds on the origin of the philosophy of Christianity. In Plotinus we find a number of Nicene formulations a century before that council; and so more than ever do we realize that just as Plato summated early Greek philosophy, so Plotinus fused the thought of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, and put this Greek heritage in a shape in which it could be used practically by a young religion as explanation of many of its mysteries.

There is still another living issue in our study of Plotinus; what is the independent value of the mystic ecstasy, the authority for which has always more or less involved Plotinus? Numenius had drunk deep at the Oriental Hermetic sources, and through Amelius this doctrine must have been found convenient to explain the epileptic attacks to which we are told Plotinus was subject. But to demonstrate a physical basis for mystic experiences does not deny

the latter, nor invalidate them; but it does supply a basis for more careful criticism of these experiences.

Plotinus summates Greek thought; he is the sunset of the ancient world-conception, and the dawn of the new; and this latter can never be justly evaluated without a knowledge of its source, Plotinus.

AUTHOR.

The Relation between Thought and Action from the German and from the Classical Point of View. The Herbert Spencer Lecture Delivered at Oxford, October 20, 1917. By ÉMILE BOUTROUX. Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1918. —pp. 32.

The text chosen for this discourse is the saying of Herbert Spencer's that if two opposing terms both have bases in the reality of things, then between them there must be a fundamental harmony. The author begins by saying that the *thought* and *action* of ordinary life seem at first to imply each other, but reflection soon reveals antagonisms between them. Thought is universal, independent of time, patient in solving problems; action is particular, limited in time, and compelled to be decisive. Are they, in reality, indissolubly connected or radically different? The German answer to this question—to which Kant gave direction—is the assertion of a complete dualism; thought deals with things from the mechanical point of view; the principle of action is absolute freedom. The problem of German philosophy after Kant was as to how this abstractly ideal principle of action could become realized concretely. Only, for the Germans, in material success and the control of the visible world, M. Boutroux thinks. He points out that this exaggeration by the Germans of the rights of will was in part a reaction from an opposite tendency, the tendency to define the function of the human mind as an accommodation and subordination of itself to an external reality. But, he asks, is it necessary to take either of these alternatives which oppose the mind to reality? The Greeks, believing that Thought and Being are fundamentally akin, refused to confine thought to the merely mechanical aspect of things. "Thought composes above the physical world, a moral, a social, a human, an æsthetical, a religious world, which although not reducible to material elements, is nevertheless real, and worthy of subsisting and developing." The element of the mental life through which the union of thought and action is effected—an element scoffed at by the Germans—is feeling; it is "the natural link between Action and Thought." "From the heart spring both great thoughts and great actions. Let us, then, give the heart its due."

In so far as M. Boutroux lays the blame for German mechanism and materialism at Kant's door, he is obviously a partisan interpreter of the history of philosophy. At his best and on the whole Kant pointed the way to an organic view of experience. But in his positive statement of the composition of the good life, and in his appreciation of the Greek view, M. Boutroux will seem to most readers just and wise. We need continually to be reminded by such clear statements as this that the end of life is not exclusive; that in-